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ABSTRACT

The sentences in two first grade basal readers were categorized using Joan Tough's language function classification system to determine whether lower level basal readers allowed children to use their knowledge of language functions in reading. The range of language functions and language uses in the basals was compared to those that Tough found in the speech of seven-year-old children. The findings suggested that the basals depended too much on single language functions and uses. Although the two basal readers used all the language functions that normally appeared in the repertoires of first grade children, the interpretive function in general and the reporting use in particular were used to a far greater extent in the basals than they occur in the language of children. The directive, projective, and relational language functions and uses were underrepresented in the basal readers. It was concluded that beginning basals could more effectively capitalize on the beginning reader's knowledge of language functions. (RL)

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THE LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS OF BEGINNING READERS AND OF TWO FIRST GRADE BASALS

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Recent research on the nature of the reading process has increasingly stressed the importance of the reader's contribution. The reader must use his prior knowledge and experience to reconstruct the author's message. A particularly important part of this prior knowledge that the reader uses in the reconstruction of meaning is his knowledge of language. This knowledge of language can be broken down into three major components: syntactics, semantics and pragmatics. Syntactics is concerned with language forms. Semantics is concerned with the meaning of the language, and pragmatics is concerned with the functions of the language.

Linguists have been concerned primarily with the first two aspects of language, syntactics and semantics. Their increased understanding of these aspects of language over the last several decades has influenced those researchers concerned with the relationship between language and reading. As a result, a great deal is known, for example, about the importance to the reading process of the reader's knowledge of the syntax of his language. Particularly noteworthy is the miscue analysis research utilizing the Goodman Taxonomy. Such research indicates not only that knowledge of syntax is important in the reading process in general but that it is important for even the beginning reader.

Important as such work is, this emphasis on syntactics and semantics in reading research, as in linguistic research in general, has been at the expense of research regarding pragmatics, that is research concerning the use of language to achieve one's communication goals. For example, one can use language to achieve goals such as the following:

Promising
We'll go to see that movie tonight.

Warning
Be careful! The stove is hot.

Apologizing
I'm sorry that I arrived late.

Greeting
Hi! How are you?

Ordering
Close that door immediately!

These are, of course, just a few of the many functions that language serves. Yet researchers may indeed have neglected this aspect of language. Regarding pragmatics, Kinneavy (1971) argues that the purpose of communication, or what he terms aim, is actually the reason for the existence of all the other aspects of language. It is because the speaker wants to achieve certain purposes through communication that he needs lexical items (semantics) and rules to order the arrangement of these items (syntax). From such a perspective, pragmatic knowledge, knowledge relating to the use of language to achieve one's communication goals, is indeed basic to one's knowledge of language.

Compared to what is known about the child's knowledge of syntax, relatively little is known about his knowledge of language functions. However, some significant studies (Bates, 1976; Carter, 1974, 1975; Halliday, 1975; Dore, 1973) indicate that the child achieves communication goals through gestures and pre-linguistic vocalizations before he has any control over the lexical items or the syntax of his language. For example, Halliday found that between the ages of nine to eighteen months his son's pre-linguistic vocalizations served six different functions--the instrumental, regulatory,

interactional, personal, imaginative, and heuristic functions. Additionally, the work of researchers such as Dore (1975), Ervin-Tripp (1977) and Tough (1977) indicate that long before the child enters first grade he has a richly developed knowledge of the functions of language. For example, Dore's subjects in their second year used language to label, repeat, answer, request action, call, greet, protest and practice. Classifying the language of three year olds, Tough found her subjects using thirty-four different strategies to achieve four broad functions--the directive, relational, interpretive and projective functions. Such findings indicate that not only is this aspect of language the first to emerge, but it is rich and varied at a young age. The child's knowledge of language functions is a basic part of his general knowledge of language.

Assuming that indeed this knowledge of language functions is a significant and well-established part of the young reader's knowledge of language, the question arises as to whether he is able to utilize it in his attempts to read. To what extent and in what ways does the basal material the child is reading correspond to his own knowledge and use of these functions? Of course, differences between written and spoken language are undeniable and inevitable, and the child must learn to deal with these differences. Yet Shuy (1976) and Smith (1971) suggest that even greater differences exist between spoken language and the language of beginning reading texts than exist between spoken language and the language of other types of reading material. It is possible that the significant differences here may deny the young reader the opportunity to utilize his knowledge of language as he attempts to gain control over the reading process.

The basic question, then, of whether basals permit the child to use his knowledge of language function as he reads is clearly a significant one. In an attempt to answer it, the present study dealt specifically with two related questions:

Question 1: What language functions are found in beginning basals?

Question 2: How well does the basal repertoire of language functions match the child's repertoire?

The present study was exploratory in nature. Relatively little research has been done on children's knowledge of language functions. Most studies dealing with the six-year-old's functional knowledge have been conducted either in classroom situations or in situations structured to elicit functional responses deemed important for success in school. While such studies may indeed indicate the functional variety of the child's language in school, they do not necessarily indicate the variety of functions the child uses in other contexts. In addition, there is no research dealing directly with how one's knowledge of language functions specifically relates to the reading process. Despite such limitations, the questions raised in the present study are significant ones to consider because of the importance to the reading process of other types of linguistic knowledge. The assumption is that if other types of language knowledge have proved to be so important to the reading process, then one's knowledge of language functions, perhaps the most fundamental aspect of his language knowledge, will be important to that process also.

Procedures

In an attempt to answer the above questions, the language functions used in two beginning basals were analyzed. The two basal readers selected for the study were Signposts, the first reader of the 1971 Houghton Mifflin series, and Together We Go, the first reader of the 1970 Harcourt Brace series. These first readers were selected rather than preprimers or primers, assuming that the expanded vocabulary load of first readers was more likely to offer the potential for matching the functional competence of the beginning reader.

In selecting a language function classification system for categorizing the basal sentences, two criteria were used. First of all, because research indicates that the child's pragmatic competence is extremely rich, it was deemed important to select a system that was capable of reflecting this richness. Secondly, in order to draw conclusions concerning the correspondence between the range of language functions of the child and the range found in the basals, it seemed advisable to select a classification system that had actually been utilized in a study of children's language. Because of the limited number of studies of the first grade child's language functions, basically there were two choices of classification systems: Halliday's system (1975), which was used by Pinnell (1975), and Tough's system (1977). Halliday's system seemed less able to deal with the richness of the child's functional knowledge, because the system employs only seven categories. While Tough's system defines only four functions, these are subdivided into a total of nine uses of language each of which is fully defined by means of the strategies used to achieve

the nine language uses. What is especially important is that Tough's categories were derived from extensive observations of children. This system was considered more capable of reflecting children's functional competence. Using this system to categorize basal sentences by function, it should be possible to determine how closely the basal's function repertoire matches the beginning reader's function repertoire.

Tough defined language function as "the means by which a purpose is achieved" (1977, 44). She identifies four functions: (1) the directive function which is concerned with the direction of actions of either self, others, or self and others; (2) the interpretive function which is concerned with commenting on ongoing or past events or situations; (3) the projective function which is concerned with the use of the imagination to explore situations in which one is not and may never take part, and (4) the relational function which is concerned with establishing and maintaining relationships with others. Tough subdivided the functions into uses of language which were defined as the means by which the different types of meaning (intentional meaning) are made evident. The following outline delineates the language functions and uses identified by Tough. Each language use is illustrated by an example of children's language taken from Tough's data.

Function	Uses of Language	Examples
Directive	1. Self-directing	I am going to cut the clay to make two bits ...the same...Then I'll flatten them out...
	2. Other-directing	Put your brick right on top. Be careful...don't push it...

Function	Uses of Language	Examples
Interpretive	1. Reporting on present and past experiences	That's a cowboy and that's an Indian. There's a see-saw ...and it goes up and down...
	2. Reasoning	And the ice cream was all soft 'cos we forgot to put it in the fridge.
Projective	1. Predicting	My dad's going to make me a see-saw...when it's summer he's going to.
	2. Empathetic	The cowboy wouldn't like going up and down on the see-saw...it would make him feel sick.
	3. Imaginating	(The child puts two boxes on the floor and says) That's for a house where the man lives...and that one's for the car... a garage.
Relational	1. Self-maintaining	I want a biscuit.
	2. Interactional	You want a piece of candy?

Using this category system of Tough's, each sentence in the two selected basals was classified according to its function and use.

To establish inter-rater reliability, an independent coder was trained in the use of Tough's classification system. In preparation for the actual process of establishing reliability, ten sentences per language use (total of 90 sentences) were selected from the previously classified sentences of Together We Go and Signposts. The coder was given the entire text of the story for each sentence in order to have the advantage of full context that the researcher had. The coder classified each of the 90 sentences according to function and use.

Acceptable agreement was defined as 70 percent or better. Using this criterion, acceptable agreement was reached in all four function categories. At the language use level, acceptable agreement was reached in six out of

nine categories. The three use categories in which agreement was not reached were the self-directing use (60%), the reasoning (40%), and the self-maintaining use of language (60%).

Results and Discussion

Tough found her subjects using the four language functions and nine language uses as early as the age of three. In order to compare Tough's findings concerning the child's knowledge of language functions and uses with the ways these are employed in basals, every sentence in the two selected basals was categorized according to function and use. Each sentence was classified only once. In those instances where categorization in more than one function or use was possible, the researcher selected the one she considered dominant. The findings in regard to the proportion of sentences falling within the four functions in Signposts appear in Figure 1 and the findings for Together We Go appear in Figure 2.

A look at Figures 1 and 2 shows that both basals use the entire range of functions that the six year old child has in his repertoire. Superficially, this might indicate that the young reader can use his function knowledge when he reads. Yet a closer inspection shows that while all four functions are employed by the basals, a large majority of the sentences fall within the interpretive function: 62.8 per cent in Signposts and 69.4 per cent in Together We Go. Not only is the interpretive function the most frequently used function in both basals, but Figure 3 indicates there is a striking similarity between the frequency of use of each function within the two basals. The question arises as to whether or not this represents an over-reliance on the interpretive function and an underrepresentation of the

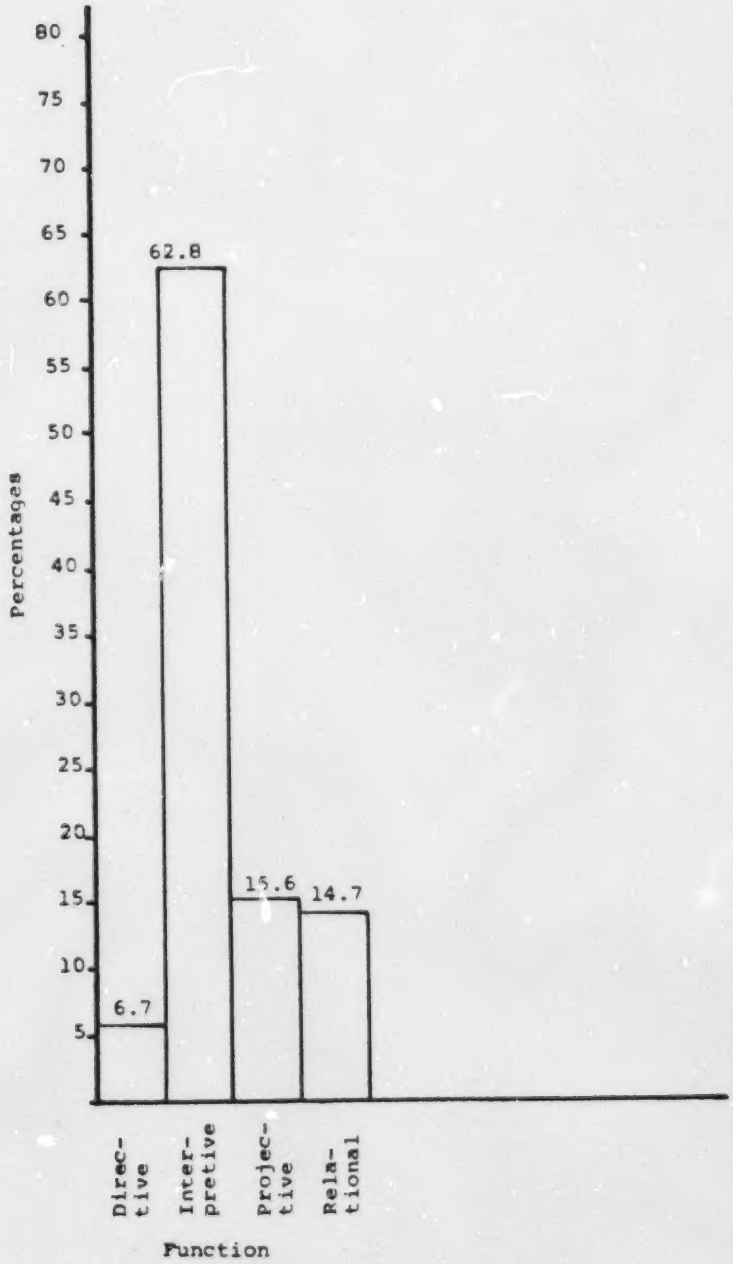
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Figure 1

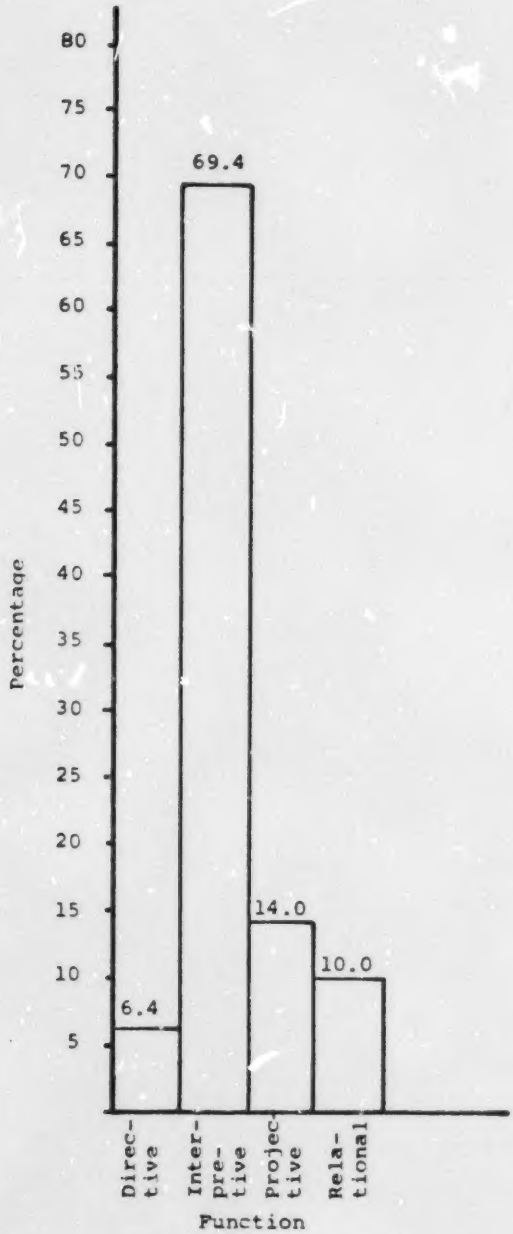
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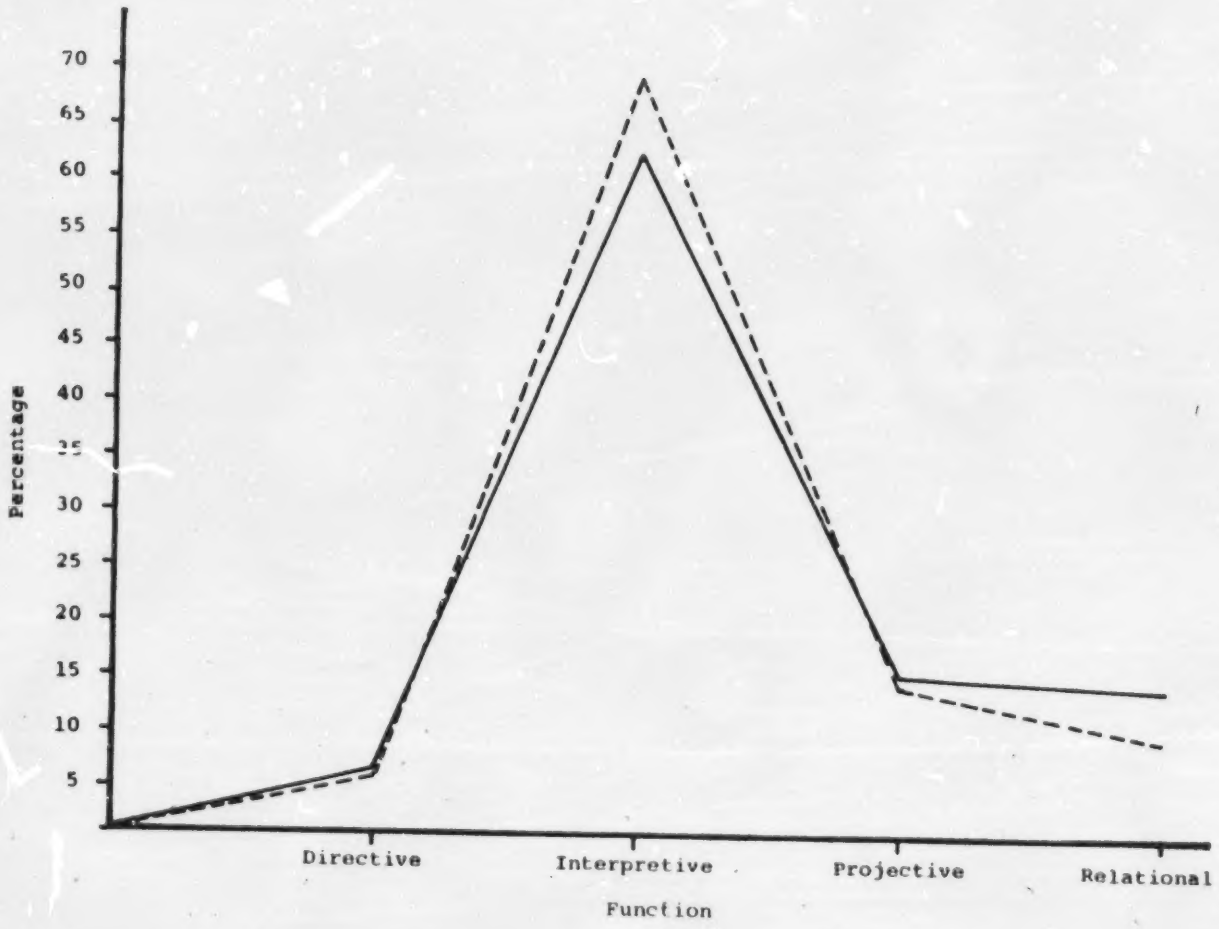
Figure 2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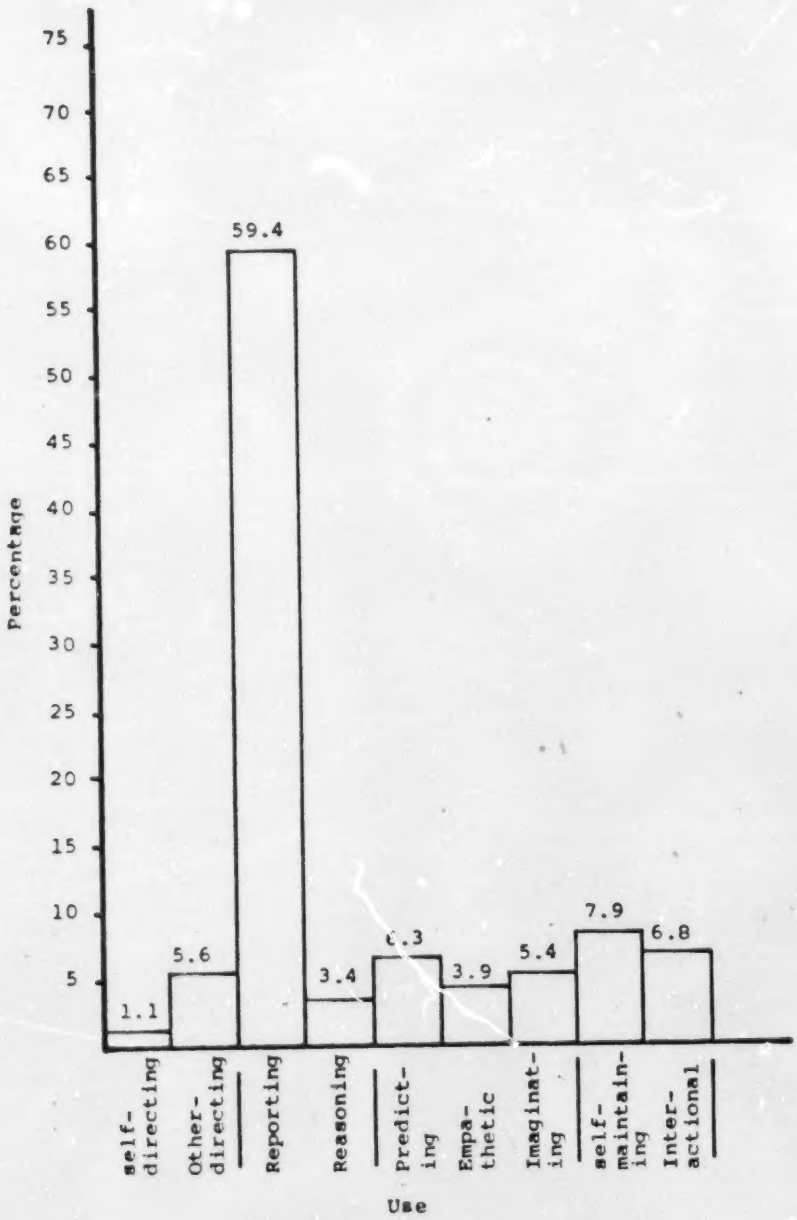
Projective
Relational
Function

Figure 3

other three functions. However, to determine whether or not the data really do signify such an over-reliance, it would be necessary to know the proportion of beginning readers' utterances in natural situations that fall into the interpretive function.

The percentages of sentences falling within the nine uses of language in Signposts appear in Figure 4, and the percentages in Together We Go appear in Figure 5. As in the case of language functions, both basals employ the entire range of language uses that the six year old child presumably has in his repertoire. However, in Signposts, 59.4 per cent of all the sentences fall within one use of the interpretive function, the reporting use. In Together We Go, 68.3 per cent of all the sentences fall within this same language use. As was found in the case of language functions, Figure 6 indicates there is a marked similarity between the basals in regard to frequency of language use. The question of a possible over-reliance on a single language use arises.

The findings of the present study suggest an over-reliance on the interpretive function and reporting use and an underrepresentation of the remaining functions and uses. However, to determine with certainty whether or not the data really do signify such an over-reliance and underrepresentation, it would be necessary to know to what extent beginning readers use Tough's functions and uses in natural situations. Tough's work indicates presence/absence of specific uses within selected situations. What her work does not indicate is the extent to which children of different ages utilize the various language uses. The findings in the present study strongly indicate the need for just such a study.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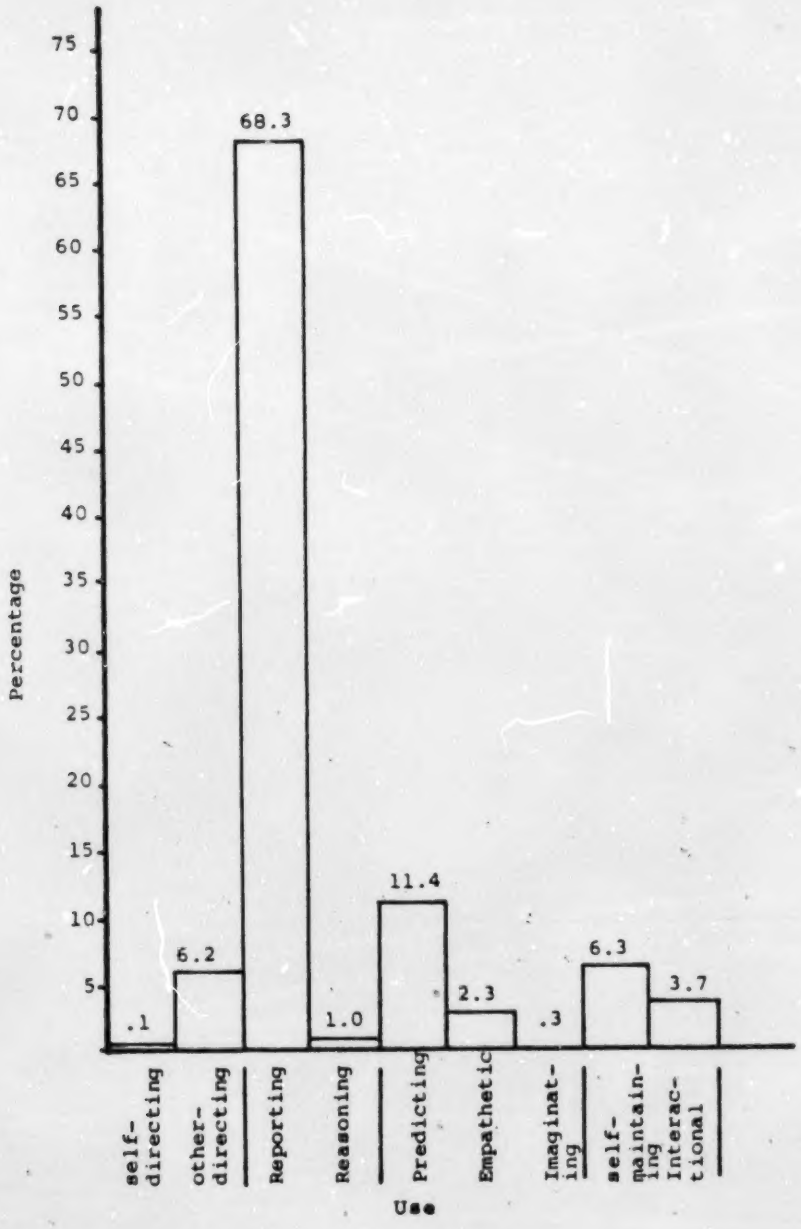
Use

Figure 4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other-directing
Reporting
Reasoning
Predicting
Empathetic
Imaginating
self-maintaining
Interactional
Use

Figure 5

Percentage
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10
5
Self-directing
Other-directing
Reporting
Reasoning
Predicting
Empathetic
Imagining
Self-maintaining
Interactional
Use

Figure 6

Pinnell's study of the language functions of six year olds interacting in an open classroom was a limited attempt to ascertain proportions of children's use of various language functions in one setting. Comparisons between Pinnell's study and the present study are only minimally helpful for two reasons. First of all, Pinnell used a different classification system, and there is no one-to-one correspondence between categories of the systems. Second, the lack of in-depth category definitions by Pinnell makes any comparison of categories of the two systems problematic. Nevertheless, despite these very serious drawbacks, comparisons of the findings of the two studies may shed some light.

Despite imprecise correspondences between the categories of the two classification systems, Pinnell's informative function seems to basically be the same as Tough's interpretive function. Also, many of the utterances that Pinnell classified as heuristic (questioning) might well have fallen within Tough's interpretive function. For any comparison made between the findings of the present study and Pinnell's findings, it will be assumed that all the utterances Pinnell classified as heuristic would fall within Tough's interpretive function.

Classifying the language of 12 first grade children interacting in open classrooms, Pinnell found the following proportion of child-child utterances falling within the following categories:

Function	Percentages
Instrumental	7.09
Regulatory	14.70
Interactional	48.32
Personal	5.49

Function	Percentages
Imaginative	8.45
Informative	13.86
Heuristic	2.07

Assuming that indeed Pinnell's informative and heuristic functions correspond to Tough's interpretive function, this means that in an open classroom, in which the children presumably responded more naturally than they would have in a more structured classroom, the children utilized the "interpretive" function only 15.93 per cent of the time in child-child interactions. In Signposts, the interpretive function was utilized 62.8 per cent of the time. In Together We Go, it was utilized 69.4 per cent of the time. On the basis of what can at best be described as questionable comparisons between studies utilizing two different classification systems, this supports the earlier suggestion that the basals may indeed over-rely on the interpretive function at the expense of the relational, projective and directive functions.

In conclusion, while indeed the two basal readers do utilize all the functions and that the six year old child presumably has in his repertoire, the findings of the study tentatively indicate that (1) the interpretive function in general and the reporting use in particular are used to a far greater extent than these occur in the language of the child, and (2) the directive, projective, and relational functions and the uses occurring within these functions are underrepresented. It would appear that beginning basals could more nearly match and thus more effectively capitalize on the beginning reader's pragmatic knowledge.

Limitations

The present study is limited in several ways. First of all, it was assumed that the child's knowledge of language functions is important to the reading process. This seems a logical assumption, given (1) the importance of this aspect of the child's language knowledge and (2) the importance of other aspects of the child's language knowledge to the reading process. Nevertheless, it is an assumption; no research directly supports this assumption.

Second, there was no attempt to determine whether or not the two basals used in the study were representative of first grade basal readers. Therefore, the results of the present study are not generalizable beyond these two basals.

Third, each sentence in the two basals was categorized according to only the function and use considered dominant. However, language is more complex than this; an utterance often serves more than one function.

Questions for Further Research

Despite these limitations, the present study has raised several interesting questions which deserve attention. First, how do beginning readers use the various functions and uses in natural situations? This is no simple question to answer because of the difference in usage created by situational variations. But to determine if the findings of this study are valid, the question must be answered.

Second, what is the role of one's pragmatic knowledge in reading? Are there actually any indications that the beginning reader attempts to

use his knowledge of language functions when he reads? Perhaps a study of beginning readers' miscues would help answer this question.

Third, can texts be structured in such a way as to give the beginning reader a chance to use his pragmatic knowledge? For example, perhaps dialogue tags can be constructed so that they serve as fucntion predictors (e.g. She shouted angrily, "_____.").

Fourth, is the dialogue used in basals functionally realistic? For example,various social factors determine which strategy is used in actual speech situations. Are these same social factors considered by writers of basals?

Fifth, how are the various language functions and language uses represented in higher level basals and in other types of reading materials?

No doubt answers to these questions would raise even more questions in what promises to be an exciting area to explore.

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